

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 HA-05 SS-15 PA-01 NSCE-00 INR-10

INRE-00 CIAE-00 SP-02 L-03 PM-05 DODE-00 SSO-00

MCT-02 /058 W

-----079273 182215Z /14

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FM AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7137

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MANAGUA 3229

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PINT, PINR, PORS, SHUM, NU

SUBJECT: MEETING WITH SOMOZA: JULY 15

REFS: (A) MANAGUA 3124, (B) STATE 172394, (C) MANAGUA 3125,

(D) MANAGUA 2774 PARA 10

SUMMARY: AT SOMOZA'S REQUEST, THE AMB MET WITH HIM FOR TWO HOURS ON JULY 15. SOMOZA RAISED HIS CONCERN ABOUT THE STATE OF PUBLIC ORDER IN NICARAGUA AND INDICATED THAT HE IS UNDER SOME PRESSURE TO REIMPOSE A STATE OF SIEGE. EXPRESSING THE NEED TO MAINTAIN CONSTITUTIONAL CONTINUITY, SOMOZA DESPAIRED OVER THE POSSIBILITIES FOR PEACEFUL TRANSITION, BUT ASSERTED THAT HE REMAINS OPEN TO SUGGESTIONS AND IS WILLING TO TREAT WITH THE OPPOSITION. SOMOZA AGAIN STATED HIS APPRECIATION OF PRESIDENT CARTER'S MESSAGE TO HIM, PRAISED PRESIDENT CARTER'S STRONG CRITICISM OF THE RUSSIANS ON HUMAN RIGHTS GROUNDS, AND SUGGESTED THAT A PUBLIC STATEMENT FROM THE US COULD HELP DEFUSE THE SITUATION IN NICARAGUA. END SUMMARY

1. THE MORNING OF JULY 15 PRESIDENT SOMOZA CALLED AMB DOLAUN AND INVITED HIM TO LUNCH THE SAME DAY. DURING THE COURSE OF TWO HOURS, THE PRESIDENT MADE REFERENCE TO RECENT ACTS OF VIOLENCE AS INDICATIVE OF THE POOR STATE OF PUBLIC ORDER IN NICARAGUA. SOMOZA SAID THAT HE BELIEVED THE ONLY ANSWER TO THIS VIOLENCE IS FIRMNESS AND A STRONG HAND. THE POINT HAD BEEN REACHED, SOMOZA SAID, WHERE
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PRACTICALLY NO CONCESSION HE MIGHT MAKE WOULD SATISFY THE OPPOSITION. THE POLITICAL OPPOSITION, THE PRESIDENT WENT ON, CANNOT DIVORCE ITSELF FROM THE EVENTS OF THE PAST DAYS, BUT IT IS NOT IN CONTROL OF THESE EVENTS. THE GOVERNMENT, THEREFORE, MUST MOVE TO RESOLVE THE PROBLEMS. IF IT DID SO, SOMOZA IMPLIED, ELEMENTS OF THE OPPOSITION WHICH WANT TO EXTRICATE THEMSELVES FROM THE TACTIC OF VIOLENCE MIGHT BE ABLE TO DO SO. SOMOZA,

SAYING THAT HE HAD BEEN PERSONALLY UPSET BY THE EVENTS AT JINOTEPE AND SAN MORCOS (REF A), CHARACTERIZED THOSE INCIDENTS AS GN MISTAKES. BUT, HE SAID, UNDER THE TENSION THAT HAS EXISTED FOR MONTHS, SUCH MISTAKES WERE ALMOST UNAVOIDABLE. IN FACT, HE ADDED, HE IS UNDER PRESSURE TO REIMPOSE A STATE OF SEIGE. HE IS RESISTING, HE SAID, BECAUSE HE IS CONCERNED ABOUT NICARAGUA'S IMAGE BEFORE THE REST OF THE WORLD.

2. THE AMBASSADOR AGREED WITH SOMOZA THAT A CRITICAL PERIOD WAS AT HAND. IT IS EVIDENT, HE SAID, THAT THAT OPPOSITION WANTS SOMOZA'S DEPARTURE. IT WAS TO BE EXPECTED, THE AMB OBSERVED, THAT THE

TWELVE'S RETURN WOULD PROMOTE INCREASED TURMOIL, REGARDLESS OF HOW THE GON HANDLED THAT EVENT, AND THAT PERHAPS WE WERE REACHING A CLIMAX IN THE CONFRONTATION. THE GON'S RESTRAINT UP TO NOW HAD BEEN REMARKABLE AND THE AMB HOPED THAT THE PRESIDENT WOULD NOT BE FORCED INTO RASH DECISIONS NOW. SOMOZA AGREED THAT RES- TRAIT WAS DESIRABLE, BUT LATER TOLD THE AMB THAT IT MIGHT BE NECESSARY TO MOBILIZE HIS OWN LIBERAL PARTY (PLN) IN SELF-DE- FENSE. THE AMBASSADOR URGED THE PRESIDENT TO REACT CALMLY DURING THE CRISIS, DURING WHICH COMPETING FORCES ARE TESTING THEIR RESPECTIVE STRENGTHS. THE AMBASSADOR HOPED THAT THE PRE- SIDENT WOULD CONTINUE HIS CURRENT POLICY OF NOT SEEKING CONFRON- TATION AND THAT HE WOULD NOT PERMIT THE CREATION OF PLN GANGS, STATING THAT DEVELOPMENT HERE OF A SITUATION LIKE THAT IN CONFIDENTIAL

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GUATEMALA, WHERE VENGEANCE KILLINGS OCCUR REGULARLY, WOULD BE TRAGIC, THE AMBASSADOR TOLD SOMOZA THAT DESPITE THE TURMOIL IN NICARAGUA THERE HAD BEEN SURPRISINGLY FEW CASUALTIES AND THERE WAS SOME SOLACE IN THAT FACT.

3. PRESIDENT SOMOZA TOLD THE AMB HE HAD BEEN DISTURBED BY REMARKS MADE TO HIM BY KAREN DE YOUNG OF THE WASHINGTON POST DURING A PRIVATE CONVERSATION ON JULY 14. THE PRESIDENT SAID HE WAS "SHOCKED BY HER STATEMENT THAT SHE HAD MET THOUSANDS OF NICARAGUANS AND THAT THEY ALL WANT ME TO RESIGN." ACCORDING TO SOMOZA, "SHE ASKED ME IF I HAD THOUGHT ABOUT THE NIXON SOLUTION* I CAN'T UNDERSTAND WHY IT IS THE PEOPLE DON'T SEE THE NEED TO MAINTAIN CONSTITUTIONAL CONTINUITY. FOR OVER FORTY YEARS WE HAVE MAINTAINED THAT CONTINUITY AND I KNOW THAT IF WE BREAK IT, ONLY HARM CAN COME." THE AMB OBSERVED THAT HE HAD MET MS. DE YOUNG AND THAT SHE APPEARED TO BE A MODERATE, EVEN IF AGGRESSIVE AND DIRECT, JOURNALIST. THE AMB THEN EXPRESSED HIS BELIEF THAT THE BUSINESS SECTOR'S ATTITUDES WERE CRUCIAL NOW, ESPECIALLY IN VIEW OF THE PROPOSED 24-HOUR NATIONAL WORK STOPPAGE (REF MANAGUA 3184). SOMOZA REPLIED THAT ROBELO'S (ING. AFONSO ROBELO CALLEJA'S) STRATEGY IS TO ORGANIZE A SERIES OF ONE-DAY STRIKES. IN FACT, SOMOZA SAID, HIS SOURCES TOLD HIM THAT AMBASSADOR SOLAUN HAD BEEN QUOTED TO THE EFFECT

THAT SALVADOR ALLENDE HAD NOT BEEN OVERTHROWN BY JUST ONE STRIKE, BUT BY A SERIES OF STOPPAGES. THE AMB EXPRESSED SURPRISE AT BEING QUOTED THAT WAY. (NB: BUT THIS THEME HAD IN FACT BEEN STATED BY ROBELO IN A CONVERSATION WITH THE AMBASSADOR). THE AMBASSADOR ASSURED SOMOZA THAT IN ALL OF HIS CONVERSATIONS WITH OPPOSITIONALISTS HE HAD STRESSED THE NEED TO PRESENT SPECIFIC ACHIEVABLE DEMANDS TO THE GON TO TRY TO INITIATE THE RECONCILIATION PROCESS. THE AMBASSADOR ASKED FOR THE PRESIDENT'S ASSESSMENT OF THE PROPOSED STRIKE. SOMOZA SAID HE THOUGHT THE STRIKE MIGHT BE 50 PERCENT SUCCESSFUL. HE SAID THAT OPPOSITIONIST DOCTORS WOULD JOIN AND SEGMENTS OF THE COMMERCIAL SECTOR SUPPORTED IT, BUT THE INDUSTRIALISTS DID NOT WANT TO SUPPORT THE EFFORT. THE AMB OFFERED HIS IMPRESSION THAT THE LARGEST FINANCIAL GROUPS ESPECIALLY WERE NOT SYMPATHETIC TO STRIKES.

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4. THE AMB WENT ON TO SAY THAT HE WAS TRYING TO LEARN WHETHER THERE EXISTS A POSSIBLE POLITICAL SOLUTION ACCEPTABLE TO THE OPPOSITION AND THE PRESIDENT. HE ASKED SOMOZA THAT IF ELECTIONS WERE ADVANCED TO 1980, WOULD THAT SATISFY THE OPPOSITION? THE PRESIDENT REPLIED THAT A CHANGE IN THE CONSTITUTION WOULD BE NEEDED BUT THAT HE WAS OPEN TO NEGOTIATION OF A POLITICAL ACCOMMODATION. THE PRESIDENT ASSERTED THAT HE COULD NOT UNILATERALLY PROPOSE ANY MEASURES AS THAT WOULD ONLY ENCOURAGE EFFORTS TO OBTAIN HIS RESIGNATION. HE REAFFIRMED HIS BELIEF THAT THE OPPOSITION INTERPRETED ANY CONCESSION AS REFLECTING HIS WEAKNESS. THE AMB OBSERVED THAT NO CLEAR FORMULA FOR COMPROMISE HAD EMERGED AND WONDERED IF THE CONCLUSION OF THE CHAMORRO ASSASSINATION INVESTIGATION MIGHT NOT BE A CRUCIAL FACTOR TO REDUCE TENSIONS, GIVEN THE CRUCIAL STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF CHAMORRO'S LA PRENSA. SOMOZA SAID THAT THE CHAMORRO FAMILY WOULD NOT BE CONTENT UNTIL HE TURNED OVER POWER TO THEM. THE PROBLEMS BETWEEN THE CHAMORROS (AND LA PRENSA) AND THE SOMZAS WERE SUI GENERIS IN NICARAGUA, SOMOZA SAID. EVEN SO, THE AMB NOTED, IN COLOMBIA THERE HAD BEEN SIMILAR CONFRONTATIONS BETWEEN EL SIGLO AND THE GOVERNMENT PRIOR TO "LA VIOLENCIA." SOMOZA ASKED HOW THE SITUATION HAD BEEN RESOLVED AND THE AMB REPLIED THAT A PACT BETWEEN THE LIBERALS AND CONSERVATIVES HAD FINALLY LED TO PEACE.

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5. SOMOZA ASKED THE AMB HOW THE STATE OF SIEGE HAD WORKED IN THE COLOMBIAN CONTEXT. THE AMB REPLIED THAT SINCE 1958 MARTIAL LAW HAD BEEN ONLY PARTIALLY IMPOSED. MILITARY TRIBUNALS REPLACED CIVIL COURTS, BUT FREEDOM OF THE PRESS WAS CONTINUED. SOMOZA REPLIED THAT SUCH A SOLUTION WOULD NOT SOLVE HIS PROBLEMS, WHICH STEMMED FROM NEWS MEDIA AGITATION. THE AMB AGAIN OPINED THAT AN UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN LA PRENSA AND THE GON SEEMED ESSENTIAL TO A PEACEFUL TRANSITION. SOMOZA REPLIED THAT AGREEMENTS WERE PART OF NICARAGUA'S POLITICAL PROCESS AND THAT HE WAS OPEN TO SUGGESTIONS. PRESIDENT SOMOZA ASSERTED THAT HE INTENDED TO RELINQUISH POWER, THAT HE DID NOT FEEL THAT HE HAD A DIVINE RIGHT TO RULE, BUT THAT HE COULD NOT ALLOW THE COUNTRY TO COLLAPSE.

6. PRESIDENT SOMOZA AGAIN EXPRESSED PLEASURE ABOUT PRESIDENT CARTER'S MESSAGE TO HIM (REFS B AND C) AND ASKED HOW THE PRESIDENT GOT HIS INFORMATION. THE AMB REPLIED THAT THE SAME EMBASSY REPORTING THAT THE PRESIDENT HAD CRITICIZED (REF D) WAS THE SOURCE OF PRESIDENT CARTER'S INFORMATION, ALTHOUGH, OF COURSE, THE AMERICAN PRESS WAS ALSO A VITAL SOURCE OF INFORMATION. SOMOZA SAID THAT IF WASHINGTON WOULD GIVE HIM ITS ASSISTANCE, THE SITUATION COULD BE DEFUSED. THE AMB ASKED IF SOMOZA WAS REFERRING TO A PUBLIC STATEMENT AND SOMOZA REPLIED AFFIRMATIVELY, SAYING THAT THE POINT CONFIDENTIAL

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SHOULD BE MADE THAT RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS WAS THREATENED BY THE POLITICAL SITUATION AND THAT IN ORDER THAT THE HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY SUCCEED THE CITIZENRY SHOULD "TAKE IT EASY."

7. PRESIDENT SOMOZA SAID HE HAD BEEN PLEASED BY PRESIDENT CARTER'S STANCE ON THE RUSSIAN DISSIDENTS' TRIALS. HE TOOK THIS AS A SIGN THAT THE USG WAS NOT JUST CRITICIZING ITS FRIENDS. IT WAS EASIER FOR THE GON TO ACCEPT CRITICISM, SOMOZA SAID, IF IT WAS CLEAR THAT SUCH CRITICISM ALSO GAVE THE USG THE FLEXIBILITY TO TACKLE THE RUSSIANS.

8. PRESIDENT SOMOZA ALSO TOLD THE AMBASSADOR THAT HIS GOVERNMENT

WAS ACTIVELY LOBBYING THE US CONGRESS TO RE-ESTABLISH NICARAGUA'S ELIGIBILITY FOR MILITARY ASSISTANCE. HE SAID HE WOULD LIKE TO HAVE THE STATE DEPARTMENT'S ASSISTANCE WITH THESE EFFORTS AND THAT HE WISHED THE AMB TO INFORM WASHINGTON ABOUT THIS MATTER.

9. COMMENT: SOMOZA APPEARED UNUSUALLY CONCERNED ABOUT THE CURRENT SITUATION. IN THE CONTEXT OF HIS REPORTING OF THE DEYOUNG - SOMOZA CONVERSATION HE SEEMED TO BE PROBING TO SEE IF THE US WOULD LIKE TO SEE HIS RESIGNATION. AS DO ALL OTHER ELEMENTS, SOMOZA RELIES ON WHAT HE INTERPRETS AS SIGNALS FROM THE EMBASSY AND THE DEPARTMENT. SOMOZA MAY NOW BE ELICITING "POLICY GUIDANCE" OF A SORT FROM THE USG BY SEEKING SOME REACTION TO A "TOUGH-GUY" APPROACH. HE MAY, IN FACT, BE CONSIDERING FOR THE FUTURE REIMPOSITION OF A STATE OF SIEGE AND OTHER "FIRM" MEASURES AS A "LAST RESORT" INSTRUMENT. THE EMBASSY HAS OBSERVED THAT SOMOZA'S RECENT STRATEGY HAS BEEN TO MAKE CONCESSIONS USUALLY ONLY AFTER CONSIDERABLE PRESSURE HAS BEEN EXERTED. OFTEN THE CONCESSIONS COME AFTER THE MOST OPPORTUNE MOMENT FOR THEM HAS PASSED AND, CONFIDENTIAL

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ACCORDINGLY, THEIR POLITICAL IMPACT IS MUTED OR THEY ARE NOT PRODUCTIVE AT ALL. FOR EXAMPLE, IN THE IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH OF THE CHAMORRO KILLING THERE WERE DEMANDS BY THE OPPOSITION FOR A HIGH-LEVEL INVESTIGATING COMMISSION WHICH RECEIVED NO RESPONSE FROM THE GON. SOMOZA EVENTUALLY NAMED AN INVESTIGATING GROUP, BUT BY THE TIME HE DID SO THOSE NAMED REFUSED TO SERVE AND THE WHOLE IDEA WAS NO LONGER CONSIDERED SUITABLE. REGARDLESS OF ANY SPECIFIC DEMANDS WHICH MIGHT BE MADE BY THE OPPOSITION IN THE FUTURE, IT APPEARS THAT THE PRESSURE OF RECENT EVENTS IS BEING FELT. IT IS ALSO EVIDENT THAT SOMOZA REALIZES THAT IF A SOLID MAJORITY OF THE BUSINESS AND FINANCIAL COMMUNITY IS WILLING TO TRY TO PUSH HIM OUT HE IS IN REAL TROUBLE.

10. ACTION REQUESTED: DEPT MAY WISH TO CONSIDER INSTRUCTING AMB TO EXPRESS TO SOMOZA THAT USG WOULD PUBLICLY REGRET ANY DECISION TO REIMPOSE MARTIAL LAW AND WOULD CONSIDER SUCH A MOVE AS A MAJOR STEP BACKWARDS FROM OTHER RECENT SIGNS OF FLEXIBILITY WHICH PRESIDENT CARTER NOTED IN HIS MESSAGE TO SOMOZA.
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Message Attributes

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